

Unleash the Power...Of Our Destiny

by Illyandria V

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Summary: Caesar killed everyone that Xena knows...and Ares must help his princess cope with her loss.

Unleash the Power...Of Our Destiny

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>
 Title: Unleash the Powerâ€¦of Our Destiny

>
 Author: Illyandria

>
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>
 Violence/Sex/Profanity: Bit of violence, no sex, and really not profanity. The one word I do use in the first part is not used as broadly as some people use it. Over all rating of this story so far is PG or PG-13.

>
 Love: Well, gods! Have I ever written anything that wasn't at least slightly romantic? Anyway, no alternative or subtext stuff here. Can't very well be, 'cuz Gabby is dead! Yeah, I'm sorry guys, but I'm so sick of Gabby. I was about to hurl during that whole Gabby/Ares thing in "Seeds of Faith". Besides, I killed off a lot of people here, not only the irritating blonde. Anyway, the only love in here is Xena/Ares.

>
 Dedication: This story is dedicated to Jo, Noie, Kat, Nicola, Delenn, and everybody else in the Ares and Xena Shippers Club. Thanks for all of the encouragement guys!

>
 Author's Note: Takes place before the Hercules episode "Armageddon Now Part I" and after the Xena episode "When in Romeâ€¦", but before "A Good Day". E-mail all comments to AresAdorer@aol.com.

>
 And we also jump around the timelines too, like some of the people mentioned lived in the 4th century BC or something. In other words, I'm doing in this story what the writers do in the series. Lol

>
 ~*~

>

Part One:

> ~ Temple of Memories ~

> Xena wrapped her arms around herself, trying to keep the cold air away. It seemed so unreal. Everyone was gone. Everyone. Damn Caesar to Tartarus. It seemed as though all of his legions were there that day. She and Gabrielle had been in the Amazon Village visiting Ephiny. They had had less than a day's notice that Caesar was coming. And everyone who had come to help were no match for the Romans. Iolaus had come, but not Hercules, for he was in Ireland. And now they were all dead: Gabrielle, Joxer, Iolaus, Ephiny, and so many more. Only she and a few others had survived. Everyone else had perished. It wasn't even a war. It was a massacre. Damn Caesar. Damn them all.

> Now, here she was. Wrought with grief and numb with pain. It was all her fault. She'd made Caesar kill Crasus, and now he wanted revenge. And even if he didn't realize it, he had gotten his revenge. Everyone she cared about was dead. But that wasn't enough for him, and she knew that he'd be back. Maybe she should get out of here and seek refuge—

> A presence interrupted her thoughts. He'd been here for hours. But why didn't he just appear?

> She glanced around, trying her best to look irritated, even though deep in her subconscious she knew she needed him now.

> He must have noticed her look though, for he disappeared suddenly.

> She sighed, half happy to have gotten rid of him, and half disappointed that he didn't appear and comfort her.

> Suddenly, she jumped to her feet as she heard a soft voice in her head. She looked around cautiously. Someone had said 'I'm sorry'. It must have been him. But why in Tartarus would he say that he was sorry?

> She sat back down, thoroughly irked. After an hour of sitting in cold silence, trying to determine whether the voice was real or just a figment of her imagination, for lack of better things to do, she decided to go to his temple. Besides, she needed a place to hide for awhile, until she got herself together. And she wanted to know why he was there in the first place. Had he come to gloat? It didn't seem to likely, since he did leave. And if he had spoken into her mind, then he surely didn't come to gloat. But why else would he have been there?

> Oh well, she thought. _ Off to Ares' temple I go—

>
 ~~~***~~~

>
 Here we are, Xena thought.

>
 After sneaking past about a dozen Roman search parties that were out to find and kill her, she'd finally made it to Ares' dark and incredibly grim temple. She walked to the entrance, took a deep breath, and stepped inside.

>
 A black marble alter stood in the middle of the spacious room. Candles were scattered throughout the place, their flames flickering, giving the room a mysterious aura.

>
 At once, she felt connected to this temple, and to the god it belonged to. He represented war, something she couldn't live without, something she loved, and she couldn't deny this. She felt at home here, as much as she hated to admit it—and with good reason.

>
 Xena walked to the alter, running her hand along its smooth surface. Her eyes glinted with reminiscence. This is where she used to sacrifice to her patron god: Ares. But, to be more accurate, each time she had killed it felt like a sacrifice to him. After each of her victims' deaths, she felt closer to the god. With each war cry

she felt more aliveâ€|

>
 She shook her head to rid herself of those thoughts. A tear ran down her cheek, sparking in the dim light. What scared her is that she still felt the same way. She lived for battle, and with each fight, she felt more connected to him. To war, and to him. The godâ€"not just what he represented.

>
 Xena picked up one of the candles, and walked to a dark, long-forgotten corner of the temple. There it was: the secret door.

>
 _He's probably in thereâ€|

>

> On the middle of the wall, but the left side of the door, was a design of gold and rubies. A tiny, almost invisible hole was in the middle of the design.

> Xena let a smile bless her face as she unhooked a small black pouch from her armor. Years ago, she had considered throwing it away, putting everything in their past behind her. But she couldn't. He was a part of her, and he would forever be.

> She opened the bag, retrieved a gold key, and unlocked the door. There was a stairway, leading to the bottom of the temple.

> Xena grabbed an old torch, and with the candle, lit it. She sat the candle back on the table that she had taken it from. With torch in hand, she made her way down the staircase.

> Gods, she could still remember everything about this place. There were thirty-six stairs leading to the bottom. In the middle of each section of the wall, a large copy of the rune on his old pendant was carved into the stone.

> When she reached the base of the stairs, she looked down the passageway. Murals of epic battles covered the two walls all the way down to the end. She walked down the hallway, stopping dead in the middle.

> There, on the left wall, was a large muralâ€|depicting the Battle of Corinth. And there she was, in the midst of the chaos.

> This had been a gift from Aphrodite during one of the last years that Xena had lead his army. It was the best mural that Xena had ever seen; it was so intricate and detailed.

> "Godsâ€|" Xena breathed.

> Why did I even come here? I knew that this place would bring back so many memoriesâ€|

>
 She shook her head and continued down the hallway. When she reached the end, she stopped again. On the left side of the door, a life-size statue of herself in her old armor stood. And on the right side of the door was a statue of Ares in that trademark black leather of his. Both were made by Lysippus, a great sculptor.

>
 Xena's thoughts were interrupted as she heard a voice yelling. She pressed her ear against the closed door, trying to figure out what was going on.

>
 "Strife! How could you screw up so completely?"

>
 Xena recognized that voice to belong to Ares. She listened harder.

>
 "Hey, Unc, I don't see what the big deal is! The bard is dead; so what?"

>
 "She was Xena's best friend!"

>
 "Andâ€|?"

>
 "STRIFE! Caesar just slaughtered everyone that she's ever cared about! That was NOT the plan! WHY did you tell Caesar to send ALL of his legions there, and so QUICKLY, and without any notice to Xena? FIRST of all, you weren't supposed to do ANYTHING AT ALL until I got BACK from PERSIA! Secondly, we WEREN'T GOING to INTERFERE in the first place! Xena and Caesar go way back, and she can DEAL with

him HERSELF! If YOU hadn't have INTERFERED, SHE would have WON, and they'd STILL be ALIVE!"

>
 "Oh, so what? I screwed up, it's no big deal!"

>
 "STRIFE! OUT!"

>
 "Fine, fine! Sheesh!"

>
 Xena heard Ares sigh, and figured that Strife had left. She breathed deeply, and quietly opened the door.

>
 It was a large room, much larger than main temple room upstairs. There were four couches, two of them about six feet in front of the fire, and the other two on opposite sides of the room against the walls. All four were covered in maroon and black silk. In between the two couches in front of the fire was a small, elegant, dark cherry table. On top of the table was a bottle of wine and two glasses.

>
 Adorning the wall above the fireplace was a large mural depicting the day that Ares had taught her how to use the chakram. They were in a grassy meadow outside of camp, Ares standing behind her, one hand on her waist, and the other guiding hers.

>
 Adorning the other walls were more murals, depicting important times of their lives.

>
 Xena's heart melted. Why did he keep all of this stuff here? Why didn't he just throw it out? She didn't serve him anymore, so why did he keep it?

>
 She finally looked to Ares. He was sitting on the couch, eyes closed, head in his hands. He wore all black leather and a glorious sword was kept at his side. His perfectly groomed dark ringlets hung down, barely brushing his shoulders. Around his neck he wore a sword pendant, and on his left ear was an earring, a sword identical to the one around his neck.

>
 "Ares?" Xena whispered.

>
 He lifted his head and stood up quickly. When he saw her there, he froze, stunned.

>
 "Xeâ€|Xena?" he finally got out. "Sweet, what are you doing here?"

>
 She gave a small shrug. "Why didn't you just appear this morning? Why'd you just lurk around, not telling me why you were there?"

>
 "I wasâ€|ahemâ€|just watching over you. I mean," he grimaced, "you wereâ€|umâ€|in pain, and I didn't think you'd be able to fight against those Romans if they found you. So I just 'lurked' around so that you wouldn't get hurt."

>
 He looked at her, not seeing anything in her expression.

>
 "Iâ€|I guess it wasn't necessary. I meanâ€|you can take care of yourself. Umâ€|I - I told you I was sorry." He shrugged. "I guess I should've just left you alone."

>
 Xena looked at him carefully. "No, that's alright. I mean, I was out of it, so I probably wouldn't have been any match for those soldiers if they found me. Umâ€|thanks."

>
 They stood in uncomfortable silence for awhile.

>
 "How did you get in here?" Ares asked quietly.

>
 Xena shifted, embarrassed. "Iâ€|kept the key."

>
 Ares raised an eyebrow. "You told me you threw it into the fire."

>
 She shrugged, and shifted again. "Iâ€|"

>
 Ares, seeing her discomfort, said quickly, "Never mind. It's not important."

>
 They stood in silence for a little longer.

>
 "Did you come here for a certain reason, orâ€|?" Ares asked finally.

>
 "I don't know. I was just a little irked about that voice in

my mind. I wasn't sure it was you, soâ€¦"

>
 "Oh," Ares said. He paused. "If you'd like to stay, you're welcome to."

>
 "You wouldn't mind?" Xena asked.

>
 "Sweet, you need someone," Ares said. "If you trust me, then I'll be that someoneâ€¦ Do you trust me?"

>
 She looked at him. He had that devoted, affectionate look in his eyes, and she knew he wouldn't hurt her. "With my life."

>
 He smiled, that genuine Ares smile that she'd so longed to see again. He held out his hand, and when she took it, he led her into the next room: the bathing room. He led her past the tub, to the door that led to a small hallway. Opening the door, he led her down the hall to the last room: the bedroom.

>
 The room was rather small: only a bed, fireplace, and a walk-in closet.

>
 Ares gestured to the closet. "You might be more comfortable in a nightgown."

>
 She nodded in agreement, and walked into the closet. Knowing that everything was made to fit her, she randomly picked out a black silk nightgown.

>
 Ares, without being asked, turned around, not wanting to test her patience.

>
 She smiled slightly, and changed into the garment.

>
 When she finished, he turned back around. As she laid down on the bed, he asked, "Do you want me to stay? Or would you rather be alone right now?"

>
 "Stay," Xena said quickly. "Please?"

>
 He smiled, with a thought removed his vest, and laid down beside her, pulling the covers over them both.

>
 Eyes closed, she moved closer to him.

>
 Ares took this as a sign to hold her, and with a small sigh, did just that for the rest of the night.

>
 ____~**~____

>

Chapter Two:

> ~ Faithâ€¦ Loveâ€¦ Forever ~

>
 When Xena awoke, she expected Ares to still be there, but in his place found a note. She frowned slightly and opened it. It read:

>

> Xenaâ€¦

> I have some very important business to attend to, and I'll try to be back as soon as I can. Sweet, please don't leave. Make yourself at home.

> --Ares

>

> Xena shrugged and stood up, running her fingers through her long hair. She looked through the closet, and decided to wear a ruby-red dress. She slipped out of the nightgown and put it on.

> Silently, she walked down the small hallway, old memories flooding back.

> Last night she had felt like crying. When he'd taken her into the bedroom, so many memories had come back. But one in particular had stood out from the rest.

> The last Solstice they had ever spent together was spent in that room. That night when he had given her the chakram, a weapon made especially for her, which he'd had forged by Hephaestus himself. That

night when their adoration for each other had reached its peak. That night when they had made love for the last time.

> A single teardrop ran down her cheek. She remembered it all perfectlyâ€|the taste of the sweet wine they had drankâ€|the way he'd touched herâ€|

> That's one of the things that made their current relationship so hard. She couldn't picture him as the villain - which he surely was, right? - because she remembered that side of him she loved so much.

> Xena shook her head, forcing back tears. She entered the main room, and walked to the fire.

> Looking up at the mural, she couldn't keep the tears back any longer. He'd been so sweet to her while she was a warlord.

> She shook her head. What was she saying? He'd LOVED her when she was a warlord. And now, things had changed. They were enemiesâ€|right? Right. And they'd be damned if they told each other how they felt.

> She missed him so much. She missed everything about himâ€|the way he teased herâ€|the comfort of his embraceâ€|the taste of his lipsâ€|

> "Xena?"

> She jumped, startled beyond all Tartarus, and turned to see Ares there.

> "Sweet, what's wrong? You're cryingâ€|" Ares said softly.

> "Iâ€|" she began, and then stopped herself. "No I'm not. Just something in my eye." She wiped away the tears, and smiled - rather pathetically - at him.

> "I can read you like a scroll Xena," he said. "I don't believe that for a second."

> "Aresâ€|I don't want to talk about it, okay?" Xena said.

> He sighed, nodded, and changed the subject. "You look beautiful."

> Flattery. That's another thing she missed. The flattery.

> "Thanks," she murmured.

> They stood in silence for awhile.

> "When Caesar gets back to Rome," Ares said, "he'll be killed."

> She looked at him blankly.

> "I talked to Brutus, and he'll talk to the Senate. Caesar plans to make himself emperor, and they probably won't stand for it. I think the Senate will kill him."

> She stared off into space for a moment. "Thanks," she murmured again. "Thank you so much."

> "Anything for you, my sweet," Ares said.

> Her mind drifted from the loss of her love, back to the death of her friends. From one tragedy to another.

> "Bring back Gabrielle," she whispered sadly.

> Ares looked at the floor. "I'm sorry Xena. If I could, I would have done that already. But I can't. Zeus will find out, and he'll kill me."

> "I know. I don't expect you to. Just wishful thinking." She forced a grin.

> Ares studied her face. "Oh, my warrior princess. So strong, so brave. But you don't have to be. I know that you're crying inside. Let it out."

> She looked up at him, tears coming to her eyes. Soon, she was crying.

> Ares held her gently as she laid her head against his chest.

> "Whyâ€|whyâ€|whyâ€|whyâ€|?" Xena cried. "This shouldn't have

happened! It's all because of your moronic nephew! It's his fault! It wasn't supposed to be this way! I could've won! I could've won had he not intervened! It isn't right!"

> "I know, I know," Ares said quietly. "I'll make sure that he's punished Xena."

> She continued to cry.

> "Well, it's my fault too," Ares said. "If I hadn't have left, he wouldn't have interfered. And if he had, I would've stopped him. I wasn't here, and this happened. It's my fault to, Xe."

> "It's not your responsibility to watch over him. You had business in Persia, he should've known how to handle himself. It's not your fault, it's his."

> Ares shrugged slightly. "Whatever you say, sweet."

> "I just can't believe they're gone. They're gone!" Xena sobbed, laying her head back on his chest.

> Ares moved towards one of the couches and laid down on his back, never breaking their embrace.

> After what seemed like hours of crying, she couldn't cry anymore. Finally realizing what she was doing, and that she had shown weakness in front of him, she pulled away, standing up, wiping at her eyes.

> He looked at her and quietly stated, "You don't trust me."

> She looked into his eyes and suddenly felt guilty. He was trying to help her, to comfort her, and she had pushed him away. But they were enemies. She'd done the right thing, rightâ€| No - no she hadn't.

> "I - I'm sorry," she said softly. "I do trust you Ares. It's just that - I don't know. You've tried to manipulate me so many times. I just - I just don't know if this is another scheme."

> "Xena, when I do that, it's just to - oh, test you. I never hurt you, do I?" Ares asked.

> She shook her head.

> "And I'd never - EVER - try anything when you're hurting inside, Xe."

> "What about when Solan died?" she asked. "You told me to embrace my anger for Gabrielle, to accept it."

> "I knew that if you did, you'd end up in Illusia. And you did, and you two worked everything out, didn't you?" Ares explained.

> She nodded.

> He stood up and walked to her. "I promise I won't do anything to hurt youâ€| I swear you can trust meâ€| "

> She moved close to him and fell into his embrace. "I trust youâ€|â€|â€| I trust you Aresâ€|â€|â€| "

> "I'll help you through this Xena," he promised. "I'll do whatever you need me to. I'll be there for youâ€|always."

> She couldn't stand it any longer. She lifted her head and kissed him.

> He pulled away uncertainly. "Xenaâ€| "

> "Just kiss me you bastard," she said. "Not gonna make you do anything drastic, okay? Just kiss me."

> He obeyed whole-heartedly.

> When they pulled away she sighed and closed her eyes, laying her head on his chest.

> "Nothing drastic - yet," she murmured.

> He grinned, and they laid back down on the silk couch, side by side, Ares' arm wrapped around her waist. They were silent for a long time, each lost deep in thought.

> How can I make her feel better? How can I take the pain awayâ€| Ares asked himself.
>
 _How can they be gone? I didn't even get to say good-bye. They

died for no reasonâ€¦|_ Xena thought.

>
 "I didn't even get to say good-bye," she whispered, accidentally thinking aloud.

>
 "Hmm?" Ares asked, too lost in thought to comprehend what she had just said.

>
 "Nothing," Xena said.

>
 "What?"

>
 "I didn't even get to say good-bye," Xena said.

>
 "Sweetâ€¦|I could get Hades to let you see them," Ares said.

>
 "You can? You will?" Xena asked.

>
 "Of course my dear," Ares said, and got up.

>
 Xena followed, and he wrapped his arms around her waist.

>
 ____~***~____

>
 They appeared beside Hades, who was making his rounds in Tartarus.

>
 "Aresâ€¦|Xena," Hades said. "What are you doing here?"

>
 "Xena's going to the Elysian Fields to say good-bye to her friends," Ares said. When he saw that his uncle was about to deny her passage, Ares mouthed 'please'.

>
 Hades raised an eyebrow and considered. "Very well. You may go say good-bye to your friends, Xena."

>
 "Thank you, Hades," she said.

>
 Ares grinned and nodded. He led Xena down to the entrance of the Elysian Fields. He stopped at the entrance.

>
 "Take as much time as you need, my dear," Ares said.

>
 She smiled, tilted her head up, and kissed him. "Thank you."

>
 He nodded, and she walked through the gateway.

>
 ____~***~____

>
 Ares had been waiting hours for Xena to return, but he didn't mind. It gave him a chance to think.

>
 Finally, she came back.

>
 "Thank you, Ares," she said. "Thank you so much."

>
 "Anytime, Beautiful," he said.

>
 She took his hand, and they appeared back in his chambers.

>
 "Xenaâ€¦|" he said cautiously, "there's something I need to tell youâ€¦|" He paused, struggling.

>
 "What is it?" she asked. _Please say what I think you're going to. Please. Please. Please let him say itâ€¦|_

>
 "Iâ€¦|ahâ€¦|"

>
 "Yes?" _Please. Please. Please._

>
 "I thought I should tell you thatâ€¦| That Caesar is dead," he chickened out.

>
 "Oh," she said, disappointment on her features, even though she should be happy.

>
 He looked at her. _ Who am I fooling? She'd never go for itâ€¦|maybe she likes me as aâ€¦|a friend, someone she can trust or somethingâ€¦|but she'd never go for it. I don't deserve her. _

>
 Damn it, Ares! she thought. _Why didn't you say it? Why? Haven't I hinted that I love you? Didn't I kiss you? _

>
 "Xena, I have to go," he said.

>
 "Ohâ€¦|should Iâ€¦|leave?" she asked.

>
 "You can if you want to, I suppose," he said. "I'll be back, though, if you'd like to stay."

>
 "Then I'll stay," she said.

>
 "Good. I'll be back as soon as I can." He disappeared.

>
 ____~***~____

>
 Ares appeared in Aphrodite's palace. He walked down the

hallway, down to the main room. Everything was pink.

>
 He sighed. _Why does she have to be the only one that actually likes me? That understands me? She's my exact opposite. _

>
 When he entered the large room, he found her lying on a silk covered table, a man standing over her, massaging her back.

>
 "Aphrodite?" he asked.

>
 She looked up. "Ares! Bro, whatcha doin here?"

>
 "Iâ€|umâ€|need to talk," he said. "Privately." He gestured at the masseuse.

>
 "Well, I NEED my massage, you know," she said.

>
 Ares sighed and walked over to her, and ushered the masseuse away, sitting at the edge of the table. He continued the massage himself.

>
 Aphrodite smiled. "Now, what do you need to talk about, stud?" she asked.

>
 He hesitated. "Xena."

>
 "The warrior babe?" Aphrodite asked. "What about her?"

>
 He cleared his throat.

>
 She grinned suddenly. "Oooohh! So, you finally wanna tell her, huh?"

>
 He rolled his eyes. "Yeah," he said. "So what should I do?"

>
 "Just tell her, man!" Aphrodite said.

>
 "But - but what if she doesn't love me?" he asked. "We have a good thing going right now, and I don't wanna wreck it, ya know?"

>
 "You can't wreck anything by telling her," Aphrodite said. "Ya shoulda told her a loooooong time ago. Now is the time, if ya ever wanna."

>
 "I - I don't know. She's rejected me so many times," Ares said.

>
 "Do it!" Aphrodite said.

>
 "Okay," Ares said. "I'll tell her."

>
 He got up to leave, but Aphrodite tugged on his vest.

>
 "Hey! I gave you some advice, now finish the massage!" she said.

>
 "Have your masseuse do it," he said.

>
 "Oh come on! It's not everyday I get a massage by my big brother. Some women would die for it ya know," Aphrodite said.

>
 ____~***~____

>

> After finishing Aphrodite's massage, Ares went back to find Xena sleeping. He looked down at her peaceful form and smiled.
 _

> She's so beautifulâ€|

>
 He sat down on the couch opposite of her, deciding not to wake her, just wait.

>
 ____~***~____

>
 "Mmm," Xena murmured, opening her eyes and sitting up. She glanced around the room, and found Ares on the couch opposite of her. "How long have you been here?"

>
 "Hours."

>
 "What have you been doing?"

>
 "Watching you," he replied, walking to her and sitting down beside her.

>
 "Must've been boringâ€|"

>
 "Not at all," he said, running his fingers through her raven tresses. "Xena," he started, "there's something I need to tell you. You don't have to say or do anything, I just want you to know, okay? I don't know how to say this so it's easierâ€|so I'm just gonna say it straight out."

>
 She nodded hopefully.

>
 He took a deep breath. "I love you."
>
 Xena felt sheer joy come over her as she heard those words. She leaned over and kissed him passionately. "I've been waiting so long to hear you say that."
>
 A wave of relief passed through Ares as she said that. He pressed his lips to hers again, wrapping his arms around her waist.

>
 Xena slowly parted her lips, allowing his tongue to explore her mouth. Her hands were lost in his curly hair, pressing his face closer to hers.
>
 Suddenly, Zeus appeared in an angry flash of light. "Ares!"

>
 Neither Xena nor Ares heard him.
>
 "ARES!!"
>
 Ares looked up quickly, and seeing Zeus there, he pulled away from Xena.
>
 He set his teeth and took a deep breath, trying to calm himself of the anger of being interrupted. Sometimes his father was worse than that irritating blonde bard. "Yes Zeus?" he said finally.

>
 "Is it true that you're behind Caesar's death?"
>
 "Yes."
>
 "And why, exactly, did you feel the need to get him killed?"

>
 "After everything he's done, more importantly everything he's done to Xena, he deserved to die," Ares answered.
>
 "He could have been a useful asset to us."
>
 "He held no love for us gods. He would never have let himself become our pawn," Ares said. "Why are you here Zeus? You didn't come here just to ask about my rights to kill Caesar did you?"
>
 "You missed the meeting," Zeus said.
>
 "That was today?" Ares asked. He shrugged. "Oops."
>
 Zeus frowned. "You're a god of Olympus, Ares! You can't neglect your duties!"
>
 "If I recall correctly," Ares said cockily, "one of my duties is also to care for my chosen."
>
 "She is no longer your chosen, Ares! She does not serve you anymore; you should not distract yourself with her!"
>
 "She is my chosen! And she will be until she dies. No matter if she serves me or not, she is still my chosen! It's a lifetime commitment - but, then again, what would YOU know of lifetime commitments, huh?"
>
 Zeus glared at him, rage in his eyes, and suddenly a ball of light was hurling toward Xena. It hit her square in the chest, sending her into the back of the couch with much force.
>
 "Xena!" Ares yelled. He looked to Zeus furiously, but finding he wasn't there, his eyes quickly traveled back to his love as she moaned. "Xena? Sweet, can you hear me?"
>
 She became silent as she slipped out of consciousness.
>
 The sound of feet pounding on stone could be heard, and a few seconds later his high priestess appeared at the door.
>
 "What is the matter, my lord?" Illyandria asked, not able to see Xena for the couch was obstructing her view.
>
 He looked up at her, and she could almost see tears in his eyes. "Illy, it's Xena."
>
 Illyandria rushed over to him and gasped. "Who did this?"
>
 "Zeus," Ares answered. He brushed a lock of hair away from Xena's face. "She's unconscious... I - I don't know if she'll make it..." His voice was all of a sudden hoarse.
>
 A slender, velvet covered arm draped over his shoulder.

"She'll be alright."

>
 He nodded and looked up at her. "Um...what are you doing here anyway?"

>
 "I could hear you from upstairs, Ares," she said. "I was afraid the others would hear and wonder where the sound was coming from, so I came to see what was wrong before anyone became suspicious."

>
 "Did you know that Xena was here?" he asked.

>
 "Yes. I saw her come in that night."

>
 "You should have come to talk to her," he said.

>
 "I thought I should leave you alone."

>
 "Oh," Ares said.

>
 Illyandria could tell that he was still troubled, and she repeated, "She'll be alright." She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek reassuringly. "I have to take care of a few things, so call me when she wakes up, okay? I'd like to talk to her."

>
 He nodded.

>
 She looked back down to Xena, her long-time friend, and then quietly left the room.

>
 Ares looked down at his only love, tears in his eyes.

"Xena..." He ran a hand down her cheek softly. "Sweetheart, please...please answer me..."

>
 Getting no response from her still form, he gently picked her up, walked to the bedroom, and laid her down on the plush pillows. A chair appeared next to the bed, and he sat down, not to leave her until she regained consciousness.

>
 ~~~***~~~

>
 Xena opened her eyes and the first thing she saw was Ares there...head in his hands...crying silently...

>
 She sat up. "Ares," she whispered, running a hand through his curly hair.

>
 He looked up quickly, startled. "Xena..." he breathed.

>
 "I'm alright. I'm alive," she said.

>
 "Xena!" Ares whispered. "I - I thought I'd lost you."

>
 She leaned over and kissed him. "You'll never lose me." She wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him again.

>
 When they parted, he looked into her eyes confidently. "Xena," he said, producing a silver bracelet adorned with nine onyx stones, "will you marry me?"

>
 She took in a sharp breath, looking into his eyes, unbelieving. She grinned and broke into a joyous laugh. "Yes! Yes, I will marry you!"

>
 He slipped the bracelet over her wrist and kissed her. "I love you."

>
 "I love you too."

>
 ~*~

>
 THE END

End
file.